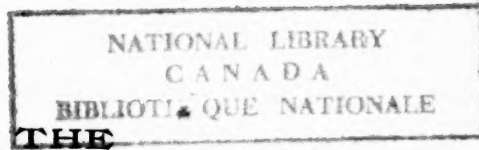


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"Sacredness of Man."

A Sermon

PREACHED IN EMMANUEL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

SUNDAY, NOV. 5TH, 1893,

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1 REV. J. B. SILCOX.

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“The Sacredness of Man.”

“*Honor all men.*”—I Peter ii., 17.

PAUL said honor was to be shown to whom honor is due. Peter says it is due to all men. Honor is due to man as man wherever found. There was a time when Peter would not have said that. There was a time when he believed in the superiority and aristocracy of his own nationality. There was a time when he refused to recognize, or fraternize with, the common manhood of humanity outside his own limited circle. But under divine education his narrowness dropped away from him, as he came to understand the full meaning and intent of the Gospel Christ had commissioned him to preach. By a heavenly vision he learned that God was no respecter of persons; learned that God had made of one blood all the nations of the earth; learned that one Gospel was to be offered indiscriminately to all nations and to every creature. When he learned this he learned the doctrine of the equality of all men before God, and therefore by divine inspiration he has bidden us honor all men. There is not a human soul on the face of the earth whom we are permitted to despise. There is something in every human being worthy our profound regard. We dare not call any man common or unclean. A man may be ignorant, degraded, vicious, yet we must honor him, because, however degraded, he has not wholly lost the divine image in which he was originally created. In every form of the human

some hint of the highest dwells. The religion of Christ insists on the inherent sacredness of every human being on the face of the earth. God never disinherits or disowns one of His own children. The prodigal among the swine does not belong to the swine. He belongs to God. God never ceased to think of him as His own offspring. God believed that the divinity within the prodigal would one day arise and lead him back to where he rightfully belonged.

Honor all men. The sacredness of man, the greatness of man, the dignity of man, the intrinsic inestimable worth of every human soul, is a vital dominant doctrine of the religion of Christ. The culmination of revelation is the ennoblement and enthronement of man. All divine institutions and agencies have for their ultimate object the ennoblement of man. Perfect manhood is the ideal and aim of the religion of the Bible. Churches, Sacraments, rites, ceremonies are sacred only as they minister to man's welfare. They derive their sacredness from their relation to man. They exist for man. They are the servants of man. They are valuable only as they are helpful to man. We talk a good deal about the sacredness of Churches and ordinances. These things are sacred only as they serve man. The only thing on the broad earth that possesses any inherent sacredness is man. Back of the Church, back of all religious ordinances and rites, back of the Bible itself, stands man, for whose service all these institutions and agencies were brought into existence. We are to measure all institutions, human and divine, by the service they render to man. "Man is more than constitutions" and more than institutions.

Jesus announced a fundamental and far-reaching principle when He said "The Sabbath was made for man." It was instituted for man's welfare. The Sabbath was not made for God. It was made for man. We have talked as though God made the Sabbath for His own glory. God does not want the Sabbath, but He ordained it, set it apart for man's good. The

Sabbath was highly venerated as a divine institution when our Saviour was on earth. He did not deride it or belittle it. What He did do was this—He made it clear that man was more sacred, more divine than the day, and that the day was set apart for man's good. God said we will take one day out of every seven, and use it, specially to enrich man's intellectual and religious nature. We will take it away from commerce and business and pleasure, and devote it to intellectuality and spirituality.

The Temple was regarded with great reverence by the people when Christ was on earth. They drew His attention to its splendid, imposing architecture. In it were many sacred relics and symbols of their faith. It contained the Holy of Holies. All that was august in law, all that was reverential in worship was represented by the Temple. To defile it was to commit sacrilege and incur divine malediction. What did Jesus say about the Temple? How did He regard this venerable pile of stones? Standing in the Temple one day, in His humanity and representing humanity, He said: "In this place is one greater than the Temple." He taught that man was greater than the Temple. The real temple, the temple of the Holy Ghost, is man himself. "The true Shekinah is man." The Temple was only a pile of stones erected for man's use. Man is as much greater than the Temple as the end is greater than the means. The Temple was reared as a helper of man's faith and hope and love. It was valuable and venerable only as it ministered to man's highest good.

This vital and basic truth of our religion is one we need to clearly comprehend.

We are disposed, and taught, to pay reverence to institutions and ordinances, forgetting the fundamental fact that institutions and ordinances exist for man. Man is above all things. He is the crown and coronal of creation. By command of God all things are put to his service. All the forces

of nature are to become subservient to his will and minister to his welfare.

Man is greater than the Temple, more sacred than the altar. The Temple was built for him. The altar was reared for him. The Temple will crumble back to dust. The altar will moulder into ashes. But man will live through the eternities in ever-growing power and splendor. There is nothing great in the world but man; and man's greatness lies in the fact that he was made in God's image and possesses a soul capable of immortality.

The Bible never belittles man. Systems of theology have belittled him; but the Bible, never. The Bible will not allow a man to belittle or think meanly of himself or of others. It holds up before every human being the possibilities of a sublime career. It bids all men rise up and claim kinship with God. We are made partakers of the divine nature. We are heirs of God; heirs to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. It doth not yet appear what we shall be.

Religion as taught in the Bible puts great honor on humanity. It reveals man to himself. It teaches man to honor himself as a being made in God's image. It appeals to our highest manhood, and bids us walk worthy our high calling. It urges us not to fall below the possibilities of our nature. It calls us to live in the higher regions of our being. It lifts us out of the animal into the intellectual, out of the intellectual into the spiritual.

What is it to live a religious life? I answer to live a religious life is to live in the highest part of our nature. It is to do the noblest deeds our nature is capable of doing. It is to develop the noblest character our nature is capable of reaching. It is to think the highest thoughts our minds are capable of thinking. It is to experience the purest joys our souls are capable of feeling. What is holiness? Holiness is developing our faculties to their highest reach and devoting them to their

highest use. Holiness is wholeness. It is manhood filled out to its full. Religion is the sunshine and song of man's nature. It is the flowering and fruiting of our being. It is the royalty of man's soul rising up and claiming affinity with God. The call of Christ to man is always a call to come up higher in thought and purpose, in character and achievement. Christ's way of making men noble is by appealing to the nobleness that lies latent in all men by reason of their original relationship to God, as made in His image. Jesus went on the principle that every man, as a child of God, belonged to God, and that his rightful place was in the home and kingdom of God.

The doctrine of the sacredness of man is a doctrine of revelation. It was learned originally from the Bible. The Christian religion teaches this truth wherever it goes. No other religion or philosophy gives prominence to the dignity and worth of man as does the Christian religion. In many instances men have accepted this doctrine without knowing or crediting the source from which they received it. The social atmosphere to-day is full of this doctrine in various forms. The worth of man, the rights of man, the sacredness of man, the superiority of man over all institutions and constitutions make up the warp and woof of the demagogue's harangue, the Nihilist's invective, the Socialist's propaganda. Men are waking up to realize and assert their inalienable God-given rights. The people who have toiled and slaved; the people who have been hewers of wood and carriers of water, the people who have done and are doing the world's hard work are beginning to realize that they are worthy of better things than they have hitherto received. They say we too are men, and have the rights of men. Our wives are women and should have the rights of women. Our children are God's children and should have the opportunities that God designs for all His children alike. The social unrest of to-day is, at the last analysis, the effort of men to live the life of men. In the various theories of social reform put forward to-day, there may be much that

is vague, crude and unwise, but at the heart of it all lies this doctrine of man's inherent sacredness and worth in the sight of God. Men believe that there is a higher good possible for them. Their dissatisfaction with present conditions has in it possibilities and prophecies of a golden age of social reform. I do not look with fear or dread on this social unrest. I believe that back of it and in it is God himself. I believe that this hope of a better day, "which rises and grows broad in the world's heart, by ordered impulse, streams from the great heart of God."

God taught the world the doctrine of man's sacredness. No philosophy ever taught it. Individual men here and there saw the truth and held it, but it received no indorsement from any system of government, philosophy or religion. The Greeks treated the outside world as barbarians. The Romans thought it strange that Seneca should insinuate that slaves were men like themselves. The old dynasties and governments were built on the worthlessness of man. The individual was of worth only as he contributed to the strength and stability of the state. Systems of political economy were built on the depreciation of man. They put property above persons. They went so far as to call persons property. They bought and sold men and women like cattle. There was a time when Christ's question "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" would have received the answer not much better. There was a time when slaves were so cheap that you could buy a slave for a sheep, provided the sheep was fat and well pedigreed!

There is a political economy to-day which says man's labor is a marketable commodity, subject to the law of supply and demand. They claim the right to buy labor in the cheapest market and sell the product of that labor in the dearest market. Thus commerce goes into the marketplace and buys up men and women as they buy sheep. The only basis of value, of a man or woman, is their power to produce wealth. This

commercial view of humanity is un-Christian and anti-Christian. Its a heresy born of hell. Some day the great Christian principle will come into play, namely, that the rights of people are superior to and must have precedence over the rights of property. It was this Christian principle that gave back to the slave his God-given birthright of liberty. It was this Christian principle the sacredness of man, the superiority of people over property, that burned and blazed like a fire of the Holy Ghost in Whittier's Songs of Freedom :

Tell us not of banks and tariffs,
Cease your paltry pedler cries,—
Shall the good State sink her honor
That your gambling stocks may rise?
Would ye barter MAN for cotton?
That your gains may sum up higher.
Must we kiss the feet of Moloch,
Pass our children through the fire?
Is the dollar only real?
God and truth and right a dream?
Weighed against your lying ledgers,
Must our MANHOOD kick the beam?"

This principle that persons are more sacred than property lies underneath the modern crusade against the liquor traffic. Men argue that the traffic brings revenue to the nation. They remind us that many distillers and brewers have much property invested in the traffic, and that property should be sacredly guarded. I answer where vested property conflicts with the welfare of the people, property must go. That was the point of contention between Christ and the people of Gadara. They were more anxious to save the swine than save the devil-possessed man. Jesus said we will save the man, and let the swine and the devils go to the sea or where they will. Commerce talks much about the vested interests of property! Christianity talks much about the sacred interests of people. "Perish banks and perish traffic" where banks and traffic clash with the "bodies and souls of men." As said the eloquent preacher of England's great abbey, "I would trample

every vested interest or sham-vested interest into the dust which exists only for the blight and ruin of mankind." The curse of God was written on Babylon because as said the Seer of Patmos, their merchandise was of pearls and precious stones, wine and wheat, sheep and horses, and last and worst of all, "the bodies and souls of men." Such traffic is not unknown to-day. That is a poor political economy which adds wealth to a community, but does not augment the manhood and womanhood of the country.

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey
When wealth accumulates and MEN decay."

If you visit the graveyard of nations and read the inscriptions on the stones you will find that nation after nation sickened and died because of the degeneration of the people. It is not "high raised battlements," nor labored mounds, nor "cities proud with spires and turrets crowned," nor "starred and spangled courts where low-browed baseness wafts perfume to pride" that constitutes the greatness of a nation. But

"Men, high-minded men,
With powers above dull brutes endued—
Men who their duties knew,
But know their rights and knowing dare maintain."

These constitute the nation's greatness and glory. It is true, forever true, as Mentor said to Telemachus, a nation's prosperity is not to be measured by the opulence of her palaces, but by the comforts of its houses. Assyria was rich, Babylon was opulent, Rome was luxurious. Why then did they fall? Because their political economies nursed wealth and concentrated it in the hands of a few, while it drained and degraded the many whose labor produced the wealth. Ill fared these lands because while wealth accumulated *men* decayed. If it be true that history repeats herself, then in these facts there is a solemn warning for the English Monarchy and American Republic, for no where on the face of the earth are there such glaring contrasts between sumptuous wealth and

shivering poverty as in these two nations. The widening cleft, the deepening chasm between capital and labor, between the "leisure class" and labor class, is portentous of troublous days to come. As said an English Bishop the zones of enormous wealth and degrading poverty, unless carefully considered, will presently generate a tornado, which when the storm clears may leave a good deal of wreckage behind!

The governments and dynasties of ancient days made everything of the institution and nothing of the individual. Institutionalism was the death of individualism. Men were looked on as bricks to be built into the institution. That was the prominent and dominant idea in the Empire of the past. The Nebuchadnezzar, the Pharœahs, the Cæsars, the Napoleons of history put no value on the individual man. Their Empires were reared on the insignificance of man. The palaces and temples of antiquity rose on the degradation of the masses. The Pyramids stand to-day as the eternal monuments of the wrong done to labor, and bear silent but eloquent witness to the degraded conceptions entertained of man by those in authority.

The Bible is in direct contrast and opposition to all this. A spirit of humanity breathes through the whole book. God's thought of man, God's interest in man, God's love for man, glow and gleam from every page. The sacredness of man is at the basis of the legislation of Moses, the poetry of David, the oratory of Isaiah, the logic of St. Paul, the vision of St. John, and most of all the atoning sacrifice of Christ. The Bible is the charter of man's manhood. It is the bulwark of the people's liberty. When men learned from the book that they were made in God's image and redeemed by God's Son, it was impossible to longer enslave them. Man was discovered to himself in the Bible. His relation to the Supreme Being revealed to him his real worth. Therefore he snapped the fetters that bound him and stood forth a free man. It is impossible to enslave a Bible-reading people. He who from

this book learns his place in Creation's plan will never bow to the dictation of priests in religion, nor to the despotism of kings in politics. The Magna Charta of the thirteenth century, the Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Declaration of Independence by the Pilgrim Fathers of the eighteenth century, the proclamation of Emancipation of the nineteenth century, grew out of the Biblical conception of man as a being made in the image of God, and redeemed by the Son of God. He who realizes his relationship to God will not submit to enslavement by man. Wherever the Bible goes it cuts a path for freedom and humanity. It ignores all racial and social distinctions, and binds in one loving fraternity all classes and conditions of men. One of the most democratic statements ever made was uttered by Paul at Athens, when he declared that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." The oneness of humanity is traced back to the Creative thought and act of God. The doctrine of the brotherhood of man is based on the fact that "God hath made of one blood all nations of men." Max Muller says: "It was Christianity which first broke down the barriers between Jew and Gentile, between the Greek and barbarian, between the white and the black. Humanity is a word you look for in vain in Plato or Aristotle. The idea of mankind as one family, as the children of one God, is an idea of Christian growth." He further says that the idea of the languages of mankind, as a science, would never have sprung into life without Christianity. "When people had been taught to look upon all men as brethren, then and then only did the variety of human speech present itself as a problem to be solved, and therefore I date the real beginning of the science of language from the day of Pentecost."

This testimony is of great value, because it comes from one who has made a special study of all religions and knows what is peculiar to each. He assures us that nowhere is the unity of man, as children of one God, taught as in the religion of Christ.

By teaching the fatherhood of God Christianity teaches the brotherhood of man. There can be no brotherhood where there is not fatherhood. The bond that unites us to God our Father unites us to man our brother.

It will help us honor all men to remember that God is no respecter of persons. His children are in every clime and of every color. The Cross of Christ ignores and obliterates all racial and social distinctions. The black and the white, the monarch and the menial, the millionaire and the mendicant bow together around one common mercy seat.

Honor all men ought to be a prominent article in our religious creed. It should lead us to override the boundaries of Patriotism and the barriers of Ecclesiasticism, and recognize one common humanity, one common brotherhood in men of every clime, color and creed. We are blood relations to the Chinaman, the Negro, the Hottentot. Love and grief are the same in their souls as ours. Their blood is as red as ours. Their tears are as salt; their smiles as sunny. If we look deeply into their eyes we shall find a soul responding and corresponding to our soul. The God whom they look to is the God to whom we pray.

"Through all disguises, place or name,
Beneath the flaunting robes of sin,
Through poverty and squalid shame
Thou lookest on the *man* within."

Honor all men. Obedience to this democratic precept would save us from many a stupid blunder. We are superficial. We judge by external appearances. We repeat the mistake of those who years ago contemptuously asked "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" We fail to recognize superior worth because it comes in humble, homely guise. We pay great respect to clothes. We toady to titles. We worship rank. We hardly dare link ourselves with any good cause until some one high up in society has put their patronizing paw on it.

The surest way to avoid such puerile folly is to honor all men. Cultivate the habit of recognizing real worth wherever you see it. Honor men, not their titles, or their wealth, or their clothes. Honor their manhood and womanhood. Be clear-visioned enough to discern noble manhood and superior womanhood, even when they come untitled and unheralded. We need the soul of the poet and the eye of the artist to see real worth in humble, homely forms. How rich our life would be if we had the art—the divine art—of seeing and sympathizing with the pathos and poetry of common life all around us.

“ Among the untaught poor
Great deeds and feelings find a home
That cast in shadow all the golden lore
Of classic Greece and Rome.”

The difference between man and man is not so great as we oft imagine. Seen from the summit of a Ferris wheel, the houses of a great city are about the same height, and the farms of the country about the same size. From God's exalted point of vision the men and women of this world are on about the same level. Judged by the standard of absolute holiness, we all fall so far short that this difference is not worth recording. One debtor in the parable owed five hundred pence; the other owed fifty. Both were equally bankrupt; both equally dependent on mercy. We are not murderers, but we are envious. In God's sight envy may be as black a vice as murder. He who envies another would murder him—if he dared. We are not drunkards, but we are proud. In God's sight pride may be as ugly a vice as drunkenness, and as hard to cure. A cold, proud woman is farther from heaven than a harlot. There is more hope for Magdalen in the brothel than for Jezebel in the palace. It was to people who prided themselves on their respectability and religion that Jesus spoke when He said: “The publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.”

When you look at it, how absurd these social distinctions are. It must make the angels laugh outright to watch these mortals strut about and separate themselves from one another in society circles. The world honors the woman who wears the silk dress, but has little honor or care for the woman who makes it. I am sometimes radically democratic enough to think that it requires more skill of head and hand to make a silk dress than to wear one. Some day the world will lift its hat to the maker of the dress as well as to the wearer. Some day we will get up to the point where Peter calls us and honor all men. We will remember our common origin and our common destiny—remember that we were made of one blood, redeemed by one Cross, and, through grace, are heirs of one heaven.

God made one happy pair from whom sprang all of every nation,
No man can claim a higher birth whate'er his rank or station ;
No patent of nobility can alter his condition,
He only is a nobleman who nobly acts his mission.

The humble man whose brawny hands are hard with honest labor
Is in God's judgment far above his leisure, lordly neighbor ;
And she who in the poor man's home does earnestly her duty
As wife and mother ranks above a useless royal beauty.

God made us all just as we are, one common blood He gave us ;
His love and grace are free to all, and only deeds can save us ;
Titles and ranks were made by man, but Death sets all things even,
To pauper and to prince alike six feet of earth is given.

Naked came we into this world and naked go we out ; then why should the spirit of mortal be proud ? Who maketh thee to differ ? " Behold all souls are mine," saith God, and all souls in His sight are equally precious. He is no respecter of persons. Honor all men was the law of Christ's life. Let it be the law of our life. He reached out hands of friendship and fellowship to all sorts and conditions of men. Let us go and do likewise.

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